

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 2655

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, HO
SUBJ: ELECTORAL LAW CHANGES: GENERAL APPROVAL AND NEXT STEPS

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 2586, (B) TEGUCIGALPA A-13

1. IN SPITE OF SOME COMPLAINTS THAT THE ARMED FORCES HAVE DELAYED THE RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL RULE UNTIL MID-1980, THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED ELECTORAL LAW AMENDMENTS AS ORDAINED BY DECREE 633 OF MAY 31, HAVE MET WITH GENERAL APPROVAL. MOST POSITIVE POINT SINGLED OUT IS THAT AN ELECTION DATE HAS IN FACT BEEN SET. NEGATIVE COMMENTS NOTE THE LENGTH OF TIME UNTIL ELECTIONS AND THE REVISED VOTING SYSTEM, SIMILAR TO THAT OF PAST ELECTIONS AND THUS SUSPECT OF POSSIBLE ABUSE, REPLACING THE INDEPENDENT NATIONAL REGISTER. VERY FEW REGRETS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED FOR THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL'S REDUCED ROLE, REFLECTING PERHAPS THAT ORGANIZATION'S INABILITY, EVEN THOUGH NOT ITS FAULT, TO ESTABLISH A ROLE.

2. THE IMPACT OF THESE AMENDMENTS WAS OVERSHADOWED BY THE SIMULTANEOUS WORLD CUP INAUGURAL, WHOSE TRANSMISSION IS BEING
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SPONSORED BY THE REGIME AND INCLUDES A LIBERAL DOSE OF PRO-GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA. SOME OBSERVERS CONCLUDE THE COINCIDENCE WAS DELIBERATE TO MUTE DISCUSSION AND REACTION. ONLY LIBERAL LEADER AND EDITOR OF EL TIEMPO, EDMUND BOGRAN, QUESTIONED THE NOTION THAT A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY IS EVEN NEEDED AFTER EVERY DE FACTO GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO RE-ESTABLISH CONSTITUTIONAL LEGITIMACY. BOGRAN POINTED OUT THAT THE 1965 CONSTITUTION IS IN

EFFECT EXCEPT FOR CERTAIN CLAUSES CHANGED BY DECREE. HE SUGGESTED GOING DIRECTLY TO GENERAL ELECTIONS UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, AN IDEA, HOWEVER, UNLIKELY TO FIND SUPPORT.

3. SEVERAL IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS NOW FACE THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL (TNE) WHICH CONTINUE WITH AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ORGANIZING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. THE TNE MUST STILL NEGOTIATE APPROVAL OF ITS BUDGET, CREATE, AND GET READY TO ISSUE ELECTORAL ID CARDS BY AUGUST 15. TO DO SO, IT NEEDS TO ESTABLISH LOCAL AND DEPARTMENTAL TRIBUNALS, A DIFFICULT ENOUGH TASK WITHOUT TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THAT THE ELECTORAL LAW IS AMBIGUOUS ABOUT REPRESENTATION ON THESE LOWER TRIBUNALS. WHILE ONE ARTICLE CLEARLY IDENTIFIES THE FOUR PARTIES THAT SIT ON THE TNE, ANOTHER IMPLIES THAT ONLY LEGALLY INSCRIBED PARTIES (I.E. THE NATIONAL AND LIBERAL) HAVE SEATS ON THE LOWER TRIBUNALS. THESE LOWER TRIBUNALS WILL BE AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN VOTER REGISTRATION AND THE QUALITY OF ELECTIONS, AND THE TWO PARTIES STILL IN THE INSCRIPTION PROCESS WILL INSIST ON PARTICIPATION.

4. COMMENT: THE POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE ESPECIALLY WELCOMED THE ELECTORAL DATE, FULFILLING, AS IT DOES, ONE OF THEIR BASIC GOALS SINCE 1972. THAT THEY HAVE ACCEPTED THE LENGTH OF TIME INVOLVED MAY ALSO BE BECAUSE THEIR OWN MACHINERY NEEDS TIME TO PREPARE. EIGHTEEN MONTHS OF POLITICAL MANEUVERING AND ORGANIZATION EFFORTS ARE BEGINNING THAT WILL PRECEDE THE SIX MONTH ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN ITSELF. DURING THIS PERIOD, THE POLITICAL PARTIES WILL HAVE

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TO RE-ESTABLISH THAT THEY ARE RELEVANT TO RESOLUTION OF HONDURAS' PROBLEMS. GIVEN SOME OF THESE PROBLEMS, THE ARMED FORCES MAY FIND ITSELF WISHING IT HAD CALLED FOR A SHORTER COUNT-DOWN PERIOD. NEVERTHELESS, FOR NOW, HONDURANS SEEM SATISFIED WITH THE GAME PLAN ELABORATED BY THE ELECTORAL LAW, AS AMENDED. JARAMILLO

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